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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PGOV ASEC IV

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: TRANSPORTATION MINISTER PROMISES  
POLICE ROADSIDE RACKETEERING WILL BE REDUCED

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) On March 1 the Minister of Transport, Innocent Anaky Kobanan (who is from the opposition Movement of Forces for the Future (MFA) party), announced the introduction of a new "single ticket" system for public transportation (mini-busses and taxis). In addition to the single ticket system, the Minister announced that the number of police checkpoints in the Abidjan area would be reduced from 200 to 26.

¶2. (U) The new scheme would charge 500 CFA (about one USD) per day for each taxi and 1,000 CFA (about two USD) for each mini-bus, and it would provide a window sticker that would supposedly permit the drivers to pass unmolested through any police checkpoint that day. Drivers also have the option of purchasing a ticket valid for one month, for 15,000 CFA (about three USD) for taxis and 30,000 CFA (about 10 USD) for mini-busses.

¶3. (U) The Minister instituted the single ticket as an answer to numerous complaints from taxi and mini-bus drivers who are the targets of roadside checks, where they lose anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes each time they are stopped and are often forced to pay bribes. However, the main transportation union Coordination National des Gares Routieres de Cote d'Ivoire (CNGRCI) came out against the Minister's new "single ticket," on the grounds that it not only places a new tax burden on the drivers (they estimate that it will cost transportation companies the equivalent of USD 14 million a year), but also institutionalizes racketeering by the police.

They also questioned its legality, since police checkpoints are the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Security and the Ministry of Defense.

¶4. (SBU) Indeed, the previous government tasked these two ministries with coming up with a solution for the problem of extortion at the police checkpoints in January 2005, over a year ago, but they have done nothing. At the ceremony unveiling the new system, Ministry of Defense officials were conspicuously absent, and the Ministry of the Interior sent only a low level representative.

¶4. (C) Comment: If it actually happens, the reduction of the police checkpoints from 200 to 26 would be a tremendous relief for all drivers in Abidjan. However, the single ticket is unlikely to stop the racketeering activities of the defense and security forces. The money extorted at the checkpoints represents an important second income, not only for the "beat cops" at the roadblocks but also for those on up in the chain of command. As long as the security forces remain poorly disciplined and underpaid, they are as likely to ignore the single ticket as they are to respect it. Still, even if it does not have much impact, this new system

is yet another sign of the Banny government's determination to tackle even the seemingly most intractable problems, especially those that affect the daily lives of the population. End Comment.

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